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News Release

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Eden Prairie man pleads guilty to health care fraud, money laundering

A 51-year-old Eden Prairie man pleaded guilty today in federal court in connection with a conspiracy against Medica, which administers the Medicaid public health care benefit program in Minnesota.

Mohamed Essa pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering. Essa entered his plea on Sept. 26 in Minneapolis before United States District Court Judge Joan Ericksen. Essa was originally indicted on March 13, 2007, while out of the country. He failed to return to face the charges, and was apprehended on April 10, 2008, in South Africa.

According to Essa's plea agreement, he admitted that from Jan. 1, 2001 through December 2004, he did unlawfully and knowingly conspire with his wife, Indadeeq Omar, and Tou Chaiker Vang to execute a scheme to defraud Medica and to obtain approximately \$1.5 million by means of false and fraudulent pretenses.

Essa also admitted that the object of the conspiracy was to fraudulently obtain money from Medica by submitting claims for translation services that had not been rendered to Medica members, and that he and the other conspirators prepared and submitted false claims to Medica.

Vang was employed by Medica in the State Public Programs customer service department. The plea agreement states that Essa admitted that he, with his conspirators, obtained from Vang Medica member information and dates of medical visits so that they could submit the false claims that corresponded with dates on which members had actual medical visits, and that they caused false documents to be prepared in an effort to justify the false claims to Medica and to conceal the scheme.

Essa and Omar owned and operated Global Interpreter Corp., which contracted with Medica to provide translation services to members who required such services when being treated by health care providers.

Essa also admitted that from Jan. 1, 2001, to Oct. 11, 2004, he unlawfully conspired with Omar and Vang to knowingly conduct and attempt to conduct financial transactions affecting interstate commerce, with each transaction involving the proceeds of the conspiracy to commit health care fraud, with the intent to promote the fraud and to disguise the source of the illegally obtained proceeds.

The plea agreement states that Omar prepared Global Interpreter checks listing fictitious interpreters as payees; that Essa and Omar provided a number of these checks to Vang, who negotiated the checks at various financial institutions; and that Omar structured the deposit of sham payroll checks payable to fictitious persons to conceal the source and nature of the fraudulent proceeds.

Essa admitted that the checks were intended to promote the health care fraud conspiracy because they caused Vang to continue to provide Medica information to him and Omar.

On July 17, 2008, Omar, 45, was sentenced to 72 months in prison, along with three years supervised release on one count of health care fraud conspiracy, 12 counts of health care fraud, one count of money laundering conspiracy, 19 counts of concealment money laundering and seven counts of promotion money laundering. She was convicted by a federal jury in December 2007.

On April 11, 2008, Vang, 39, Maplewood, was sentenced to one year and one day in prison, three years of supervised release, and was ordered to assist Omar in paying more than \$1.7 million in restitution. Vang pleaded guilty to one count of money laundering conspiracy and one count of health care fraud conspiracy.

Essa faces a potential maximum penalty of five years in prison on the health care fraud conspiracy count; and 20 years on the money laundering conspiracy count. Judge Ericksen will determine his sentence at a future date.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Inspector General, with the assistance of the Medica Special Investigations Unit, and the U.S. Department of State-Diplomatic Security Service. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John R. Marti and William J. Otteson.